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Thesis

THE TECHNIQUE OF TIME IN FICTION

by

Samuel Goldstein

(B. S., Northeastern University, 1935)

submitted in partial fulfilment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1937



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## THE TECHNIQUE OF TIME IN FICTION

### INTRODUCTION

Time, the measure of man's mortality, is a central element in his literature. Even as time bears the events of life upon its tide, so does time bind together the incidents of fiction. In fiction, as in life, time is necessary for the development of character and for the consummation of action. In fiction, as in life, time is the sea upon which all characters embark, the medium in which all action takes place.

But fiction is only a representation of life, and the time of fiction differs in many respects from the time of life. In life, time is infinite, stretching from one infinitude to another; in fiction, the time span of a story is definite, even though it may be extensive. In life, time is continuous, following the stars in their courses; in fiction, time may be discontinuous, with gaps appearing disproportionately in the time span of the narrative. In life, time goes always in the same direction, flowing out of the dimness of the past through the evanescence of the present towards the dimness of the future; in fiction, time can vary its direction, now making an excursion into the future, now retracing its path back into the past. In life, time moves always at the same constant rate; in fiction, time varies in speed---sometimes it runs, sometimes it lags, sometimes it stops.

It is this fluid, dynamic time element in fiction which differentiates it from the other forms of discourse. Where argumentation, description and exposition are circumscribed, narration is free to wander.

How does an author use this Protean tool to achieve the effects he





desires? The very flexibility of story time gives rise to many problems. Thus, the one broad problem of the technique of time can be analyzed into a number of component problems:

Duration of Time

Lapse of Time

Instantaneous Time

Simultaneous Time

Order of Time

Tempo

It must be borne in mind, however, that there is a constant interplay and overlapping of these divisions.

Duration of Time deals with the time span of the story, a definite section in the infinitudes of time---beginning when the action of the narrative begins, ending when the action ends. Duration of time must be considered in terms of story action in an attempt to answer the question, "How long a period of time---an hour, a year, a decade---should this story cover?"

The time span determined, the author will be confronted with the problem of bridging the gaps that occur between the successive scenes in the time scheme. The exacting Law of Plausibility requires the author to provide sufficient time for the action of the story to seem credible to the reader. An unskillful treatment of Lapse of Time can destroy that "willing suspension of disbelief" which every fiction writer asks from his readers. The time-sense which makes man so conscious of clocks and timetables is keen to react to an improbable time sequence, shattering the illusion which is the essence of fiction.

Instantaneous Time includes in its province the problems of indicating to the reader the exact time at which a particular scene begins or

...the very possibility of doing this first time is very important.

Then, the two main divisions of the problem of the can be analyzed into a

number of component problems:

1. Division of Time

2. Scope of Time

3. Distribution of Time

4. Allocation of Time

5. Order of Time

6. Length

It will be borne in mind, however, that there is a constant interplay and

overlapping of these divisions.

Division of Time deals with the question of the scope, a division

is made in the introduction of time—beginning with the notion of the scope—

time begins, ending with the notion of time, which is the end of the world.

Even in terms of time, there is an attempt to answer the question, "How

long a period of time—no hour, a year, a decade—should this study cover?"

The time when determined, the author will be concerned with the

problem of extending the scope and order within the successive periods in

the time scheme. The question of the allocation of time to the various

periods will be the question of the study in each of the various

periods. An excellent treatment of Order of Time can be found in the

exposition of Aristotle, which every student will find of interest.

The time-scheme which makes use of questions of order and duration is known

as being an isomorphic time sequence, characterizing the isomorphic which is

the essence of history.

Isomorphism is the relation in the previous the problem of time-

being to the relation of time to which a particular order belongs is



ends, and of stopping the flow of time to dwell upon a moment fraught with significance.

Under Simultaneous Time are grouped the problems of transferring the reader from one scene in the narrative to another scene which is taking place at the same time. This is a problem peculiar to the fluid nature of story time; it illustrates the lateral sweep possible to story time, as opposed to the inexorable forward flow of real time.

The flexibility inherent in story time allows the author to present his narrative in various Orders of Time other than the merely chronological; where real time is a one-way express, story time is a freight train which can be shunted from one track to another, and back again.

Tempo is a concomitant element to the movement of a narrative: the reader has the illusion that the story is moving rapidly, or that it is moving slowly---the illusion that much has happened in a little time, or that little has happened in a long time. But a swift tempo is not always to be attained by cramming action into a moment---nor a slow tempo by stretching one incident over a year. The problem of tempo is, strictly speaking, not temporal but psychological. The illusion, however, is a temporal one.

These are the problems---Duration of Time, Lapse of Time, Instantaneous Time, Simultaneous Time, Order of Time, and Tempo---that constitute the major problem of Time in fiction.

That problem is studied here not historically but technically, in order, as it were, to furnish a rhetoric of Fictional Time. Since an endless number of examples could be drawn from fiction, exemplification is necessarily limited. By examining the opinions of critics and the practices of authors this thesis attempts to indicate the general principles which underly





the technique of time in fiction.

## TIME IN THE NOVEL

### The Subject of Time in the Novel

Time in the novel is very different from the time of the natural sciences. It is not a linear time, but a time of experience, of consciousness, of the individual. It is a time that is not measured by the clock, but by the heart.

Time in the novel is a time of experience, of consciousness, of the individual. It is a time that is not measured by the clock, but by the heart. It is a time that is not linear, but that is shaped by the events of the story. It is a time that is not the same for everyone, but that is different for each character.

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## I

## TIME IN THE NOVEL

The Nature of Story Time

Story time is very different in nature from the chronological time that baffles the theories of philosophers and physicists. As Grabo puts it:

"Story time is a record of impressions, not of counted hours."<sup>1</sup>

This subjective time does not follow the laws of objective "Bulova Watch" time; it is more concerned with action than with the calendar, more with the emotions than with the hours.

The association that exists between action, emotion and time is pointed out by Forster:

"Life consists of action in time: this time is not a level continuum but a mountainous range, piling up into a few notable pinnacles in the past where the action was intense, assuming the form of a wall, a cloud, or a sun in the future."<sup>2</sup>

Not only is time the binding element which unites character, action and plot, but it may subtly underline the theme, the passage of time acting as an obstacle ("a wall"), moving the story on to its tragic ("a cloud") or its happy ("a sun") conclusion.

Duration of Time

The duration of time of any particular novel can be determined only by the scope of its action, the complexity of the theme with which it deals. There is a blanket school of fiction (Anthony Adverse is a notable example) which covers everything, going back to the events which precede the birth of its main character. On the other hand there is the disciplined novel (such

<sup>1</sup>Grabo, TON, 216.

<sup>2</sup>Forster, AON, 48-9.





as Robert Nathan writes) which confines itself within strict limits of time. Time is as essential to the character novel (in which time is required to indicate the development of character) as it is in the closely plotted dramatic novel (where every scene must have a proper place in the time scheme).

The most satisfying criterion by which to determine the optimum duration of time is the Unity of Subject: the story should cover no longer a period than is necessary for the treatment of the central idea.

### Lapse of Time

The mechanical methods of denoting lapse of time in the novel consist of chapter breaks and modifications of chapter breaks. Time slips away in the space between chapters, and in the asterisks or blank space between the sections that make up the chapters.

Only a shade less obvious is the direct indication of the passage of time by the author, baldly stating "Three years went by." But when the theme of the novel is tied up with the passage of time, an admirable effect of emphasis is gained not only by the statement itself but by its iteration and reiteration:

"'Oh, Starbuck! it is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky. On such a day---very much such a sweetness as this---I struck my first whale---a boy-harpooner of eighteen! Forty---forty---forty years ago!---ago! Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of the deep! Aye and yes, Starbuck, out of those forty years I have not spent three ashore. When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without---oh, weariness! heaviness! Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command!---when I think of all this; only half-suspected, not so keenly known to me before---and how for forty years I have fed upon dry salted fare---fit emblem of the dry nourishment of my soul!---when the poorest landsman has had fresh fruit to his daily hand, and broken the world's fresh bread to my mouldy crusts---





away, whole oceans away, from that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty, and sailed for Cape Horn the next day, leaving but one dent in my marriage pillow---wife? wife?---rather a widow with her husband alive! Aye, I widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck; and then, the madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly chased his prey---more a demon than a man!---aye, aye! what a forty years' fool---fool---old fool, has old Ahab been!"<sup>3</sup>

Here the proximity of Captain Ahab's poetic speech to the crisis of the novel and its thematic implications give an aesthetic justification to a recapitulation that would not ordinarily meet with artistic approval.

Authors find the use of detail very valuable in indicating the passage of time. In the following selection Hugo uses "habitual detail" to good effect, the recital of Valjean's habits bridging the gap of years:

"Nevertheless he remained as simple as at first. He had grey hair, a serious eye, the brown complexion of a labourer, and the thoughtful countenance of a philosopher. He usually wore a hat with a wide brim, and a long coat of coarse cloth, buttoned to the chin. He fulfilled his duties as mayor, but beyond that his life was isolated. He talked with very few persons. He shrank from compliments, and with a touch of the hat walked on rapidly; he just smiled to avoid talking, and gave to avoid smiling. The women said of him: "What a good bear!" His pleasure was to walk in the fields.

"He always took his meals alone with a book open before him in which he read.....

"In his walks he liked to carry a gun, though he seldom used it. When he did so, however, his aim was frightfully certain.

"He always had his pockets full of money when he went out, and empty when he returned. When he passed through a village, the ragged little youngsters would run after him with joy, and surround him like a swarm of flies.....

"The children loved him yet more, because he knew how to make charming little playthings out of straw and cocoanuts.

"When he saw the door of a church shrouded with black, he entered: he sought out a funeral as others seek out a christening. The bereavement and the misfortune of others attracted him, because he was so gentle....."<sup>4</sup>

Hugo gives the reader the impression that it was Valjean's custom to do

<sup>3</sup>Melville, M-D, 1082-3.

<sup>4</sup>Hugo, LM, 137-8.





these things. Very naturally the reader endows the simple sentences with the time necessary for all the habits to establish themselves---and the passage of years becomes very credible.

In a few lines, by a combination of elision and selective detail, Defoe very plausibly gives the impression that almost two months have gone by:

"I was near two months performing this last work, viz., rigging and fitting my mast and sails; for I finished them, very complete, making a small stay, and a sail, or foresail, to it, to assist, if we should turn to windward; and, which was more than all, I fixed a rudder to the stern of her to steer with; and though I was but a bungling shipwright, yet, as I knew the usefulness, and even necessity of such a thing, I applied myself with so much pains to do it, that at last I brought it to pass,---though, considering the many dull contrivances I had for it that failed, I think it cost me almost as much labour as making the boat."<sup>5</sup>

Defoe provides a skeleton of detail which the imaginative reader can not help but fill in. Each laborious detail provides the nucleus for a sense of the passage of time.

Not only detail---habitual or selective---can be used to indicate the lapse of time but also symbolism:

"She struggled, but weakened by degrees, and, finally, having closed her eyes, with a helpless smile, surrendered her lips up to him.

"A December snow-storm howled in the hearth-chimney, while, in the meanwhile, in the rosy reflected glow of the flames, the procession of laughing naked children under the thicket of the grapes of Bacchus danced, playing with the most holy implements of the Lord's Passion."<sup>6</sup>

The compression inherent in symbolism invests the dance of the laughing children with the suggestion of action <sup>and</sup> but of time passing merrily by.

#### Instantaneous Time:

The novelist is continually confronted by the necessity of indicating

<sup>5</sup> Defoe, LARC, 201.

<sup>6</sup> Merejkowski, RLDV, 212.





time. The most obvious solution of the problem is a definitive reference, such as these phrases from a section of Death Comes for the Archbishop:

"One afternoon in the autumn of 1851.....He had been riding since early morning.....His devotions lasted perhaps half an hour. Nearly an hour went by and then.....An hour later, as darkness came.....After supper.....A little later.....In the late afternoon of the following day.....It was the late afternoon of Christmas Day.....On Saturday, December 9th, in the year 1531....."<sup>7</sup>

Such references are particularly necessary to orient the reader at the beginning of a new section, time having lapsed in the interval between it and the preceding section.

Novels, like dramas, are made up of scenes. Occasionally there occurs a "big scene"---a crisis. Here the author is confronted with the problem of presenting and implying much---all within a few memorable moments. Conrad solves this problem of instantaneous time by a subtle association of environment and thought:

"He (Willems) shouted towards the sombre heaven, proclaiming desperately under the frown of thickening clouds the fact of his pure and superior descent. He shouted, his head thrown up, his arms swinging about wildly; lean, ragged, disfigured; a tall mad-man making a great disturbance about something invisible; a being absurd, repulsive, pathetic, and droll. Lingard, who was looking down as if absorbed in deep thought, gave him a quick glance from under his eyebrows: Aissa stood with clasped hands. At the other end of the courtyard the old woman, like a vague and decrepit apparition, rose noiselessly to look, then sank down again with a stealthy movement and crouched low over the small glow of the fire. Willems' voice filled the enclosure, rising louder with every word, and then, suddenly, at its very loudest, stopped short---as water stops running from an over-turned vessel. As soon as it had ceased the thunder seemed to take up the burden in a low growl coming from the inland hills. The noise approached in confused mutterings which kept on increasing, swelling into a roar that came nearer, rushed down the river, passed close in a tearing crash---and instantly sounded faint, dying away in monotonous and dull repetitions amongst the endless sinuosities of the lower reaches. Over the great forests, over all the innumerable people of unstirring trees---over all that living people immense,

<sup>7</sup>Cather, DCA, 1356-1367.





motionless, and mute---the silence, that had rushed in on the track of the passing tumult, remained suspended as deep and complete as if it had never been disturbed from the beginning of remote ages. Then, through it, after a time, came to Lingard's ears the voice of the running river: a voice low, discreet, and sad, like the persistent and gentle voices that speak of the past in the silence of dreams.

"He felt a great emptiness in his heart. It seemed to him that there was within his breast a great space without any light, where his thoughts wandered forlornly, unable to escape, unable to rest, unable to die, to vanish---and to relieve him from the fearful oppression of their existence. Speech, action, anger, forgiveness, all appeared to him alike useless and vain, appeared to him unsatisfactory, not worth the effort of hand or brain that was needed to give them effect. He could not see why he should not remain standing there, without ever doing anything, to the end of time. He felt something, something like a heavy chain, that held him there. This wouldn't do. He backed away a little from Willems and Aissa, leaving them close together, then stopped and looked at both. The man and the woman appeared to him much further than they really were. He had made only about three steps backward, but he believed for a moment that another step would take him out of earshot for ever. They appeared to him slightly under life size, and with a great cleanness of outlines, like figures carved with great precision of detail and highly finished by a skilful hand. He pulled himself together. The strong consciousness of his own personality came back to him. He had a notion of surveying them from a great and inaccessible height."<sup>8</sup>

The mood of the scene is accentuated by the approaching storm and the richness of connotation of Conrad's diction. The omniscience readers admit in an author permits him to depict Lingard's state of mind very plausibly.

Though not every scene is a "big scene" many of the novel's scenes must be presented vividly---with dramatic immediacy. To project the reader into the scene proper, Lewis makes effective use of a parenthetical psychological impressionism:

"The lights were switched on; the women sat on the fronts of their chairs in that determined suspense whereby a wife indicates that as soon as the present speaker has finished, she is going to remark brightly to her husband, 'Well, dear, I think per-haps it's about time for us to be saying good-night.' For once Babbitt did not break out in blustering efforts to keep the

<sup>8</sup>Conrad, OI, 273.





party going. He had---there was something he wished to think out---But the psychical research had started them off again. ('Why Didn't they go home! Why didn't they go home!') Though he was impressed by the profundity of the statement, he was only half-enthusiastic when Howard Littlefield lectured, 'The United States is the only nation in which the government is a Moral Ideal and not just a social arrangement.' ('True---true---weren't they ever going home?') He was usually delighted to have an 'inside view' of the momentous world of motors but to-night he scarcely listened to Eddie Swanson's revelation: 'If you want to go above the Javelin class, the Zeeco is a mighty good buy. Couple weeks ago, and mind you, this was a fair, square test, they took a Zeeco stock touring-car and they slid up the Tonawanda hill on high, and fellow told me---" ('Zeeco---good boat but---Were they planning to stay all night?')"<sup>9</sup>

Between the parentheses the reader peeps into the mind of Babbitt, and shares the latter's impatience with the lingering guests. This association of the reader with a protagonist in the scene is one of the most common methods of securing dramatic immediacy.

But it is not always necessary for the reader to identify himself with the characters in the scene to experience it vividly. In the following section, though the thoughts are ostensibly Doctor Ed's, the point of view is essentially detached:

"For the first time it struck Doctor Ed that this was really a beautiful graveyard. He thought of city cemeteries: acres of shrubbery and heavy stone, so arranged and lonely and unlike anything in the living world. Cities of the dead, indeed: cities of the forgotten, of the 'put away.' But this was open and free, this little square of long grass which the wind forever stirred. Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many-coloured fields running on until they met that sky. The horses worked here in summer; the neighbours passed on their way to town; and over yonder, in the cornfield, Rosicky's own cattle would be eating fodder as winter came on. Nothing could be more undeathlike than this place; nothing could be more right for a man who had helped to do the work of great cities and had always longed for the open country and had got to it at last. Rosicky's life seemed to him complete and beautiful."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Lewis, B, 128-9.

<sup>10</sup>Cather, NR, 70-71.





Willa Cather's balanced phrases and parallel sentence structure imbue the passage with a classical clarity that heightens the temporal perspective from which the scene is viewed.

Closely allied to this philosophical perspective is that comprehensive perspective which distance lends to the observer:

"The mist took pity on the fretted structures of earlier generations: the Post Office with its shingle-tortured mansard, the red brick minarets of hulking old houses, factories with stingy and sooted windows, wooden tenements colored like mud. The city was full of such grotesqueries, but the clean towers were thrusting them from the business center, and on the farther hills were shining new houses, homes---they seemed---for laughter and tranquility."<sup>11</sup>

Lewis uses a spacial perspective to suggest the temporal perspective from which he depicts Zenith. Space and time seem to be as closely related in literature as they are in physics.

As opposed to the detachment inherent in the long-range perspective, there is the sense of dramatic immediacy which can be secured by means of the present tense:

"Maud has once more kicked back her chair, says now she has to leave. And Vladimir has risen, wants to shake her hand, but she---crazy woman!---has some crazy impulse. The brazen thing! He pushes his fingers through his hair, and she kisses him, and he does not know just how he feels. Then she is gone, has slammed the door behind her."<sup>12</sup>

Here the clipped sentence structure, the short phrases, the interjections---all these supplement the present tense to produce the effect of immediacy.

### Simultaneous Time

One way of treating the problem of simultaneous time is to section the scenes and to open them with the same phrase, as Lewis does here:

<sup>11</sup>Lewis, B. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Eckstein, K. 15.





"At that moment in the city of Zenith, Horace Updike was making love to Lucile McKelvey in her mauve drawing-room on Royal Ridge.....And at that moment in Zenith, a cocaine-runner and a prostitute were drinking cocktails in Healey Hanson's saloon on Front Street.....At that moment in Zenith, two men sat in a laboratory.....At that moment in Zenith, there was a conference of four union officials as to whether the twelve thousand coal-miners within a hundred miles of the city should strike.....At that moment a G. A. R. veteran was dying.....At that moment Mike Monday was finishing a meeting.....At that moment Seneca Doane, the radical lawyer, and Dr. Kurt Yavitch, the histologist, were talking in Doane's library.....At that moment in Zenith, Jake Offutt, the politician, and Henry T. Thompson were in conference.....And at that moment George F. Babbitt turned ponderously in bed....."<sup>13</sup>

"At that moment" is the common factor which unites the scenes in the reader's mind, the magic carpet on which he flits from scene to scene while time is halted by the Joshua-like author.

The senses furnish very useful transitionary devices to bridge the gap from one scene to another that is taking place at the same time:

"And as he went he heard a gentle drumming, like the throb of a wild pulse, filling the air with mystery. Looking upward in the direction of the soft sound of the drum Micky saw a thin column of smoke going up at the edge of the wood. For at a little fire in the hills Umbolulu was eating Cassidy."<sup>14</sup>

Here sound and sight very naturally transfer the reader's attention from one scene to the other.

### Order of Time

The order of time which any narrative may follow is mathematically limited to four possibilities: (1) chronological order, (2) backward order, (3) fluctuating order, and (4) epic order.

The chronological order, which begins at the beginning and goes steadily on to the end, is employed in such traditional novels as David Copperfield

<sup>13</sup>Lewis, B, 96-102.

<sup>14</sup>Dunsany, UITH, 205.





and Don Quixote. This straightforward manner of presentation, the most "natural" method of narration, is particularly suited to the long novel, where the length and the freedom of the form permit the author to begin at the beginning. It can have the disadvantage of imposing a superficial logic of the chronos in place of a more valuable logic of causal sequence.

The backward order is more possible in theory than in practice. The mechanism of retrospect starts the story at the end and works back to the beginning. Sean O'Faolin's Bird Alone begins with the narrator an old man, then goes back to the days of his youth and the events which brought about the state of affairs at the opening of the tale. This rather freakish order can be applied to only a few themes, and its unusualness has a distracting effect upon the reader.

The fluctuating order, in which the narration progresses, retrogresses, and progresses in varying succession, is best illustrated by listing the chapter headings of Aldous Huxley's "Eyeless in Gaza":

Chapter One August 30, 1933

Chapter Two April 4, 1934

Chapter Three August 30, 1933

Chapter Four November 6, 1902

Chapter Five December 8, 1926

On occasion the fluctuating order is very effective, but it must be used with caution or it will result in the confusion both of the theme and the reader.

The epic order---beginning in the middle, going back to the beginning, and working forward to the end---is an artistically logical order to follow. The reader is plunged in medias res, and sufficient interest is generated to





carry him over the necessary exposition to the renewed interest with which he follows the progress of the tale to the end.

### Tempo

Marks<sup>15</sup> makes the following observations regarding tempo---the rate at which the story seems to move:

1. The tempo depends upon the nature of the scene---a death-scene being "slower" than a fist-fight---but in general, the pace increases with the emotion.
2. Lack of clarity slows tempo, though perfect clarity does not necessarily speed the pace.
3. Accented words and phrases slow the tempo; polysyllables with light accents sometimes speed it.
4. Variety in cadence---the accent which exists between phrases, clauses, sentences---quickens the movement of the story.
5. Hitting only the high spots---elision---speeds the pace.

The moralizing and philosophizing which made the tempo of Tom Jones and Pamela drag in so many places has, in the main, disappeared from the modern novel.

A deliberate slowing of the tempo is of considerable value in heightening suspense. Hugo used this device again and again. In the following scene, the desperate Valjean hovers over the sleeping bishop; Hugo dwells and dwells upon the moment:

"None could have told what was within him, not even himself. To attempt to realise it, the utmost violence must be imagined in the presence of the most extreme mildness. In his face nothing could be distinguished with certainty. It was a sort of haggard astonishment. He saw it; that was all. But what were his thoughts? It would have been impossible to guess. It was clear that he was moved and agitated. But of what nature was this emotion?"

The reader hurries on: what is Valjean going to do? But Hugo keeps the action back, while the retarding description goes on:

"He did not remove his eyes from the old man. The only thing which was plain from his attitude and his countenance was a strange indecision. You would have said he was hesitating between two

<sup>15</sup>Marks, CW, 92-107.





realms, that of the doomed and that of the saved. He appeared ready either to cleave this skull, or to kiss this hand."

Again that intolerable hiatus in the action, while the suspense mounts:

"In a few moments he raised his left hand slowly to his forehead and took off his hat; then, letting his hand fall with the same slowness, Jean Valjean resumed his contemplations, his cap in his left hand, his club in his right, and his hair bristling on his fierce-looking head.

"Under this frightful gaze the bishop still slept in profoundest peace."<sup>16</sup>

Only after the reader has struggled through this intervening morass of slow description does Hugo allow him to reach the hard ground of swift action: Valjean steals the silver and escapes.

#### Literary Schools and Time

The realistic school of fiction tends to treat duration of time literally. (Witness James Joyce's Ulysses whose whole bulk covers only twenty-four hours.) The realistic tenet of presenting a "life-like" picture is particularly prone to result in an unplotted, unpatterned series of incidents not causally related, slowing the tempo considerably. The psychological introspection and stream-of-consciousness techniques which have gained so much favor in the modern novel have also contributed much to the retardation of its tempo. To compensate for this, the realists have certain stylistic practices which speed up the pace of the tale: the elimination of modifiers and connectives; short, loose, clipped sentences; and forthright interjections in conjunction with a hard-boiled diction that carries emotional overtones of "pep".

The romanticists, on the other hand, with their happy disregard of the unities, wander freely over the infinitudes of time, with anything but a

<sup>16</sup>Hugo, LM, 87.





literal treatment of duration of time. The tempo of romantic novels is usually leisurely, made so by the romanticists' fondness for long descriptions and expositions, and their penchant for didactic, philosophical and rhapsodic asides.





## II

## TIME IN THE DRAMA

Duration of Time

"The time of the representation and that of the action represented must be exactly coincident.....The time of the action ought not to exceed twelve hours."<sup>1</sup>

This, the narrowest interpretation of Aristotle's conception of the Unity of Time in tragedy, was formulated by Castelvetro in 1570. It is not fundamentally different from the practice of the French neo-classical school, as described by John Dryden:

"The Unity of Time they comprehend in twenty-four hours, the compass of a natural day, or as near as it can be contrived; and the reason of it is obvious to every one,---that the time of the feigned action, or fable of the play, should be proportioned as near as can be to the duration of that time in which it is represented: since, therefore, all plays are acted on the theatre in the space of time much within the compass of twenty-four hours, that play is to be thought the nearest imitation of nature, whose plot or action is confined within that time; and, by the same rule which concludes this general proportion of time, it follows, that all the parts of it are (as near as may be) to be equally subdivided; namely, that one act take not up the supposed time of half a day, which is out of proportion to the rest; since the other four are then to be straitened within the compass of the remaining half: for it is unnatural that one act, which being spoke or written is not longer than the rest, should be supposed longer by the audience; it is therefore the poet's duty, to take care that no act should be imagined to exceed the time in which it is represented on the stage; and that the intervals and inequalities of time be supposed to fall out between the acts."<sup>2</sup>

But Dryden is not satisfied with this narrow view. Using a quotation from Corneille as a springboard, he points out the dangers attendant upon a too close observance of the Unities:

"'Tis easy for speculative persons to judge severely; but if

<sup>1</sup>Castelvetro, P, 523.

<sup>2</sup>Dryden, DP, 262-3.





they would produce to public view ten or twelve pieces of this nature, they would perhaps give more latitude to the rules than I have done, when by experience they had known how much we are limited and constrained by them, and how many beauties of the stage they banished from it.' To illustrate a little what he has said: By their servile observations of the Unities of Time and Place, and integrity of scenes, they have brought on themselves that dearth of plot, and narrowness of imagination, which may be observed in all their plays. How many beautiful accidents might naturally happen in two or three days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of twenty-four hours? There is time to be allowed also for maturity of design, which, amongst great and prudent persons, such as are often represented in Tragedy, cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to pass at so short a warning."<sup>3</sup>

The Greeks themselves, according to Lessing, conceived the unity of time as being subservient to the all-important unity of action:

"Unity of action was the first dramatic law of the ancients; unity of time and place were mere consequences of the former which they would scarcely have observed more strictly than exigency required had not the combination with the chorus arisen."<sup>4</sup>

They used the restriction as a means of simplifying the action, and to cut away all that was superfluous.

The most tenable position regarding the duration of time in drama is well stated by Corneille:

"The dramatic poem is an imitation, or better yet, a portrait-ure of the actions of men; and it is beyond question that portrait-ures are more excellent in proportion as they better resemble the original. The (dramatic) representation lasts two hours, and would be a perfect resemblance if the action portrayed did not demand more to make it seem real. So let us not stop either with twelve or with twenty-four hours; but let us confine the action of the poem to the smallest space of time that we can, that the representation may better approach resemblance and perfection."<sup>5</sup>

The less time an author requires to achieve a certain effect plausibly, the more impressive is that effect.

<sup>3</sup>Dryden, DP, 288-9.

<sup>4</sup>Lessing, HD, 418.

<sup>5</sup>Corneille, DTU, 531.





Since drama is by very nature objective, the time required for the action on the stage is actual time. The drama is the one literary form in which the continuous time of each scene is identical with "actual" time. But this is true only in theory; even while the audience is looking at the action on the stage, strange things are being done with time: banquets last only ten minutes, hours speed mysteriously by, and there is no working clock on the stage to mark the discrepancy.

### Lapse of Time

The dramatic transitions that bridge the gaps between the acts depend for their effect upon the laws of causation and expectation. The audience, after the first act of Lady Windermere's Fan, is content to leave the intervening time between the opening scene and the party scene which follows it go by without comment, because it is eager to discover whether Lady Windermere really will strike Mrs. Erlynne with the fan.

Baker mentions three ways of creating the illusion that the "supposed time" is equal to the "real time" on the stage:

1. A long scene of complicated and absorbing emotion---in the midst of a protracted emotional experience, the audience does not accurately mark the passage of time.
2. Strong motivation that telescopes action and changes in character.
3. Get the character(s) off the stage, and write a "Cover Scene".  
But whatever is written to cover a time space, long or short, must help the movement of the play to its climax.<sup>6</sup>

The most conventional way of denoting passage of time is by the dropping of the curtain. Indeed passage of time is one of the chief factors in determining choice among three, four, or five acts, according to Baker:

"If long spaces of time must be allowed for.....the dramatist will need more entr'acte space, and consequently more acts."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Baker, DT, 133-6.

<sup>7</sup>Baker, DT, 120.





There are other stage conventions which permit the dramatist to convey the impression of passage of time without unduly disturbing the illusion for his audience: lapses of time proceed apace during soliloquies (witness Iachimo's soliloquy in Cymbeline Act II, Scene 2: just before it begins, a Lady tells Imogen that it is "almost midnight." As it ends, he counts the strokes of the clock---"One, two, three,---time, time!"); and in the choral odes which the Greek dramatists used to cover action off-stage (as in Agamemnon, where the chorus sings while Clytemnestra is murdering Agamemnon and Cassandra).

Shakespeare uses song to many purposes (v. Noble's Shakespeare's Use of Song, London: Oxford University Press, 1923), among them the conveyance of the impression of time: the duke and his merry gentlemen in the forest of Arden in As You Like It literally "fleet the time carelessly" with song.

Another device, the allegorical figure---such as Shakespeare's introduction of the allegorical figure of Time in the fourth act of The Winter's Tale to explain the sixteen years that elapse between the third act and the fourth---is not in much favor with modern dramatists.

#### Instantaneous Time

The nature of the drama demands that the material it treats be capable of presentation in an objective form. This objectivity gives immediacy to the action, an immediacy which may be heightened by specific references to time.

"Direct allusions to the hour and the day, and close continuity of action, seem to add to the vividness with which a play impresses the imagination."<sup>8</sup>

When characters are in a state of tension, it is natural that they look at

<sup>8</sup> Buland, PTED, 184.





the clock. This may account for the numerous time references to be found in all dramas, references which constitute a closed-in frame of time that gives intensity to dramatic conflict and emphasizes the passage of time.

To supplement time indication by definite reference in the speeches of the characters, lighting is a valuable aid. By the dimming of lights, man can make the evening come and the night fall on the stage; moonlight, sunlight, candle-light---all these can be faithfully reproduced on the modern stage.

### Double-Time

"The characteristic theme of fiction is the alteration of human personality under the pressure of circumstance---which requires time. Yet there must be also a brisk sequence of incident."<sup>9</sup>

In the adjustment of these two elements---lapse of time to make character change plausible, and rapid tempo to make the narrative dramatic---lies the genesis of "Double-Time":

"The Double-Time scheme is a method of dealing with the dramatic element of time whereby two impressions are given simultaneously---one of swiftness and one of slowness; by one series of allusions the action seems to drive ahead furiously, while by another series the lapse of weeks and months is expressed."<sup>10</sup>

The "short time" of double-time, with its illusion of rapid movement, makes the play dramatic; the "long time", which accounts for the changes in the situations due to lapse of time, makes the play plausible.

The advantages inherent in Double-Time are summarized by Sprague thus:

"At its best, the double-time method combines with the free movement of romantic drama some of the advantages to be got by adherence to the unities."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Buland, PTED, 184.

<sup>10</sup>Buland, PTED, 184.

<sup>11</sup>Sprague, SA, 48.





On the one hand, the dramatist has the temporal freedom of the romanticists, while on the other he has the classical compression of the unities.

That Shakespeare---consciously or unconsciously---practised Double-Time no one can doubt who examines the 178 pages of specific references to Long and Short Time in his plays compiled by Clarke.<sup>12</sup>

### Simultaneous Time

The orthodox means of depicting simultaneous time on the stage is to present the two scenes one after the other. An interesting variation, but one which is prone to result in the confusion of the audience by its division of the audience's attention, is the use of multiple stage levels. Thus, in She Loves Me Not action takes place on the first and second stories of a house; and in The Eternal Road five stage levels permit the author to present simultaneously scenes taking place in Biblical and in modern times.

The screen, in The Sins of Madelon Claudet, used a similar method, the parallel actions of Madelon and her son running side by side on the screen.

### Order of Time

A strictly chronological order of time is impossible on the stage; some expositica of the preceding action is necessary. The most natural order is the epic order---from middle to beginning to end. Aristotle defines the terms very satisfactorily:

"A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Clarke, SK, 105-283.

<sup>13</sup>Aristotle, P, 11.





The most tragic order of time is a special aspect of the epic order, according to Lucas:

In tragedy a terrible inevitability is gained by beginning, not at the very beginning, but just before the catastrophe, when the tragic mistakes have been made and are beyond God Himself to undo.....The past indeed is the most tragic of the tenses. If it was happy, it is no more; if it was disastrous, it cannot be undone."<sup>14</sup>

### Tempo

The drama differs from other literary forms in that it is dependent for its effects not solely upon the author but also upon all the others who cooperate to produce it---actors, director, and audience. An unskilled cast fumbling its cues, a director misinterpreting the aim of the dramatist, or an unresponsive audience---upon such non-authorial elements does the tempo of a play depend: a cast jaded by repeated performances, mechanically reciting over-familiar lines can slow the tempo of the fastest scene; a director eager for a comic effect may distort the tempo of a serious scene; an audience unversed in the special aspects of a play's theme may find the pace too swift for their comprehension; in any event, the intent of the author has not been fulfilled.

Bosworth advances a theory to explain why farce and comedy have a speedier tempo than tragedy:

"Low notes on any musical instrument vibrate at a slower rate than high ones. Sombre emotions correspond to these low notes, and are expressed in the lower tones of the voice. The vocal sounds vibrate at a slower rate and the readings are slower as well. Comedy is found to employ the higher tones of the voice, and the vibrations are therefore higher. The readings of separate lines are also delivered at a higher rate of speed."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Lucas, T, 81-2.

<sup>15</sup>Bosworth, TDA, 201.





Eugene O'Neill uses tom-toms very effectively to keep pace with the increasing tempo of Emperor Jones. Music can subtly accentuate the tempo of each scene, as it does in The Eternal Road.

As a general rule the tempo speeds up from the crisis to the climax, then slows down with the resolution of the conflict.

The deliberate retardation of the action of a play to allow the audience leisure to savor the richness of a moment is one of the playwright's most useful tools. Witness the inn scene in King Henry IV in which Prince Hal and Poins tell the audience just what they are going to do to Falstaff, and predict just what lies he will tell, and just how they will catch him. With what relish Shakespeare dwells upon the hoax!

Krows<sup>16</sup> declares that retardation fills acting time and lends plausibility by making certain scenes "sink in".

Interruptions in the action, notes Archer<sup>17</sup>, slow down the tempo of the play---but heighten the suspense, a possible explanation of the slow fourth acts commonly observable in the plays of Shakespeare.

But the dramatist must not forget the dangers inherent in a too lavish use of retardation; the quick-thinking audience sees in the first meeting of the hero and heroine the happy ending in the last act, and the dramatist must never be slower than his audience.

Time is an active element in both suspense and surprise. In both, the effect comes of a sudden shift in tempo from slow to fast.

<sup>16</sup>Krows, PP. 160.

<sup>17</sup>Archer, P-M, 196.





## III

## TIME IN THE SHORT STORY

The short story is the most circumscribed of the forms of prose narrative. Because the short story is short---multum in parvo---it is by very nature particularly subject to the strictures of time. In the attainment of that totality of impression "with the greatest economy of means consistent with the utmost emphasis", the author must pay careful attention to his treatment of the time element in the story.

Duration of Time

Bement<sup>1</sup> suggests three reasons why the short story writer should observe the unity of time:

1. It is difficult, in the short story, to create the illusion of the passage of time.
2. It is difficult to keep related a series of scenes where the action takes place over a long period of time.
3. It is difficult to make convincing a series of events which must necessarily be fragmentary unless the story is to run to inordinate lengths.

As a consequence of these difficulties the short story usually chooses themes capable of treatment in a short duration of time---life's intenser moments.

Lapse of Time

Instead of making bald statements of the passage of time, Bement<sup>2</sup> lists the following methods:

1. Mention of events which have taken place during the interval time.
2. A brief description of incidents which have caused a change in the situation.

<sup>1</sup>Bement, WSS, 188.

<sup>2</sup>Bement, WSS, 189.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The first story is the most sensational of the group of news items.  
 It concerns the death of a man who was found dead in a room at the  
 Hotel New York. The man was found by a maid who was cleaning the  
 room. The man was identified as John Doe, a man who had been  
 staying at the hotel for several days. The man was found with a  
 gunshot wound to the head. The police are investigating the case.  
 The second story is a report on the death of a man who was found  
 dead in a room at the Hotel New York. The man was found by a  
 maid who was cleaning the room. The man was identified as John Doe,  
 a man who had been staying at the hotel for several days. The man  
 was found with a gunshot wound to the head. The police are  
 investigating the case.

DETAILS OF THE CASE

The first story is the most sensational of the group of news items.  
 It concerns the death of a man who was found dead in a room at the  
 Hotel New York. The man was found by a maid who was cleaning the  
 room. The man was identified as John Doe, a man who had been  
 staying at the hotel for several days. The man was found with a  
 gunshot wound to the head. The police are investigating the case.

1. It is difficult to see how any man could be so stupid as to  
 go to a hotel and stay in a room where he would be so easily  
 killed.
2. It is difficult to see how any man could be so stupid as to  
 go to a hotel and stay in a room where he would be so easily  
 killed.
3. It is difficult to see how any man could be so stupid as to  
 go to a hotel and stay in a room where he would be so easily  
 killed.

As a consequence of these difficulties the case is very much  
 complicated.

The second story is a report on the death of a man who was found  
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3. Changes in the appearance, habits, etc. of one of the characters.
4. Reference to a change in the season, perhaps accompanied by a brief description.

Lapse of time must be treated with great care in the short story in order to preserve the illusion of plausibility within a short space. A common method of treating lapse of time is through retrospect on the part of one of the story's characters:

"Ognev kept glancing at Verotchka's bare head and shawl, and days of spring and summer rose to his mind one after another. It had been a period when far from his grey Petersburg lodgings, enjoying the friendly warmth of kind people, nature, and the work he loved, he had not had time to notice how the sunsets followed the glow of dawn, and hoe, one after another foretelling the end of summer, first the nightingale ceased singing, then the quail, then a little later the landrail. The days slipped by unnoticed, so that life must have been happy and easy. He began calling aloud how reluctantly he, poor and unaccustomed to change of scene and society, had come at the end of April to the N----- District, where he had expected dreariness, loneliness, and indifference to statistics, which he considered was now the foremost among the sciences. When he arrived on an April morning at the little town of N----- he had put up at the inn kept by Ryabuhin, the Old Believer, where for twenty kopecks a day they had given him a light, clean room on condition that he should not smoke indoors....."<sup>3</sup>

This definitive method of time recollection may be suited to such a punctilious character as the statistical government worker of Chekhov's story, but it is not to be recommended for wide use.

Less obvious a manner of covering the years is provided by a chronicle style. In the narration of the momentous occasions that highlighted the interim the reader spans the years:

"But the struggle she'd had to bring up those six little children and keep herself to herself. Terrible it had been! Then, just when they were old enough to go to school her husband's sister came to step with them to help things along, and she hadn't been there more than two months when she fell down a flight of steps and hurt her spine. And for five years Ma Parker had another baby---and

<sup>3</sup>Chekhov, V, 23.





such a one for crying!---to look after. Then young Maudie went wrong and took her sister Alice with her; the two boys emigrated, and young Jim went to India with the army, and Ethel, the youngest, married a good-for-nothing little waiter who died of ulcers the year little Lennie was born. And now little Lennie---my grandson..."<sup>4</sup>

In this passage the reader senses the passage of time through the consciousness of Ma Parker.

The method of retrospect is a very common one, the transitional instrument usually being some concrete object, like the letter in the following extract:

"The name of my Aunt Georgiana opened before me a gulf of recollection so wide and deep that, as the letter dropped from my hand, I felt suddenly a stranger to all the present conditions of my existence, wholly ill at ease and out of place amid the familiar surroundings of my study. I became, in short, the gangling farmer-boy my aunt had known, scourged with chilblains and bashfulness, my hands cracked and sore from the corn husking. I sat again before her parlour organ, fumbling the scales with my stiff, red fingers, while she, beside me, made canvas mittens for the huskers."<sup>5</sup>

The letter starts the train of thought which transports narrator (and reader) back in time, making him note the passage of time by very contrast.

Elision is peculiarly suited to the short story. In the resume which comes as the climax of "The Price of the Head" Russell summarizes in one emphatic sentence the activities of months:

"That was the way of it. That was all the mystery. The savage had fallen enamoured of the head of the beachcomber, and Christopher Alexander Pellett had been betrayed by his fatal red whiskers. In Karaki's country a white man's head, well smoked, is a thing to be desired above wealth, above lands and chiefships, fame, and the love of women. In all Karaki's country was no head like the head of Pellett. Therefore Karaki had served to win it with the patience and single faith of a Jacob. For this he had schemed and waited, committed theft and murder, expended sweat and cunning, starved and denied himself, nursed, watched, tended, fed, and saved his man---that he might bring the head alive and on the hoof, so to

<sup>4</sup>Mansfield, LMP, 110-111.

<sup>5</sup>Cather, WM, 228.





speak, to the spot where he could remove it at leisure and enjoy the fruits of his labour in safety."<sup>6</sup>

The one sentence that skims over the action of the preceding months owes part of its effect to the elision that hurries the reader over the time that passed.

Sometimes a bizarre effect can be produced by bald elision. Mr. Whidden, in "Extra! Extra!"<sup>7</sup>, goes down four flights of stairs into a rainy night to buy a newspaper for his nagging wife. With one empty line to precede it, the next paragraph begins "Twelve years later....."

Sheer repetition hammers home the impression of time passing painfully by in this passage:

"In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed.

"They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar; then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed."<sup>8</sup>

"Rowed" becomes a bell that tolls the passing of time: every time it is repeated, hours seem to have passed.

A subtle form of repetition is hidden in the cadenced rhythm of Biblical prose:

"And Rabbi Nathan told her of his master's return to Bratzlav, and of the great work which he had done there. "He wrote pamphlets which annihilated his enemies, and great philosophical works. He showed that good deeds were worth more than a pure soul, and that Lilith did not bear demons by the lost seed of pollutions. And yet he was not proud. He still went up into the mountains and lived alone in the woods, and everywhere he practised humility. Sometimes in the evening before the Sabbath and sometimes on the morning of the Sabbath, sometimes even on plain days he used to sit with us outside his house and favor us with his wisdom. He sat on a piece of wood and leaned against a wall facing the south, and

<sup>6</sup>Russell, PH, 43.

<sup>7</sup>Sherwood, EE, 338.

<sup>8</sup>Crane, OB, 1208-9.





spoke to us of unearthly things. Often he sat on the north side, sometimes on the west side, at times on the east side; and sometimes he sat in the courtyard of the synagogue. Often he took walks with us to places near the city, and in all these places he discoursed with us of great and holy things. He told us that he was a river of flowing water which purified of all stain. He told us that in comparison with him all the sages of Israel were like an onion peel. And one day we learned from him that he was the most modest of all famous men."<sup>9</sup>

The repetition of the sentence structure, of details, and of ideas, enhanced by the ironical nature of the story's theme, gives an unobtrusive impression of the passage of time.

The short story cannot spend so much space on detail as can the novel, but nowhere is the use of detail more legitimate than in the significant indication of the passage of time:

"As time had passed, and they had only themselves to look after, their movements had become slower and slower, their activities fewer and fewer. The annual keep of pigs had been reduced from five to one grunting porker, and the single horse which Henry now retained was a sleepy animal, not over-nourished and not very clean. The chickens, of which formerly there was a large flock, had almost disappeared, owing to ferrets, foxes, and the lack of proper care, which produces disease. The former healthy garden was now a straggling memory of itself, and the vines and flower-beds that formerly ornamented the windows and dooryard had now become choking thickets. A will had been made which divided the small tax-eaten property equally among the remaining four, so that it was really of no interest to any of them. Yet these two lived together in peace and sympathy, only that now and then old Henry would become unduly cranky, complaining almost invariably that something had been neglected or mislaid which was of no importance at all.

"Phoebe, where's my corn-knife? You ain't never minded to let my things alone no more."

"Now you hush, Henry," his wife would caution him in a cracked and squeaky voice. "If you don't, I'll leave yuh. I'll git up and walk out of here some day, and then where would y'be? Y'ain't got anybody but me to look after yuh, so yuh just behave yourself. Your corn knife's on the mantel where it's allus been unless you've gone an' put it summers else."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Manheim, *ERNW*, 141.

<sup>10</sup>Dreiser, *LP*, 1374.





The reduction of the number of pigs, the sleepy horse, the decimation of the chickens, the neglected garden---such gradual decay takes time, and makes the passage of time credible to the reader.

### Instantaneous Time

Anderson uses the present tense to paint a scene vividly; the universality of the details justify the present tense which gives the passage its immediacy:

"Well, out of the stables they come and the boys are on their backs and it's lovely to be there. You hunch down on top of the fence and itch inside you. Over in the shade the niggers giggle and sing. Bacon is being fried and coffee made. Everything smells lovely. Nothing smells better than coffee and manure and horses and niggers and bacon frying and pipes being smoked out of doors on a morning like that. It just gets you, that's what it does."<sup>11</sup>

The appeal to the senses of the reader, who associates himself with the observer, heightens the effect of the present tense.

But it is not always necessary to use the present tense to impart dramatic immediacy to a scene. The following passage excitingly describes the scene of the moment in a curious mixture of past, present and future tenses:

"No word spoke the deliverer. But the Marchesa! She will now receive her child---she will press it to her heart---she will cling to its little form, and smother it with her caresses. Alas! another's arms have taken it from the stranger---another's arms have taken it away and borne it afar off, unnoticed, into the palace! And the Marchesa! Her lip---her beautiful lip trembles; tears are gathering in her eyes---those eyes which, like Pliny's acanthus, are 'soft and almost liquid'. Yes, tears are gathering in those eyes---and see! the entire woman thrills throughout the soul, and the statue has started into life! The pallor of the marble countenance, the swelling of the marble bosom, the very purity of the marble feet, we behold suddenly flushed over with a tide of ungovernable crimson; and a slight shudder quivers about her delicate frame, as a gentle air at Napoli about the rich silver lilies in the grass.

"Why should that lady blush? To this demand there is no answer---except that, having left, in the eager haste and terror of a

<sup>11</sup>Anderson, IWKW, 12.





mother's heart, the privacy of her own boudoir, she had neglected to enthrall her tiny feet in their slippers, and utterly forgotten to throw over her Venetian shoulders that drapery which is their due. What other possible reason could there have been for her so blushing?---for the glance of those wild appealing eyes? for the unusual tumult of that throbbing bosom? for the convulsive pressure of that trembling hand---that hand which fell, as Mentoni turned into the palace, accidentally upon the hand of the stranger? What reason could there have been for the low---the singularly low tone of those unmeaning words which the lady uttered hurriedly in bidding him adieu? 'Thou hast conquered,' she said, or the murmurs of the water deceived me; 'thou hast conquered---one hour after sunrise---we shall meet---so let it be!'"<sup>12</sup>

This melodramatic mingling of the eagerly anticipatory future tense with the descriptive past and present tenses plausibly presents the scene through the eyes of a bystander.

#### Simultaneous Time

The short story resembles the play in the continuous nature of its action. The limitations of its length impose restrictions in time and space which usually leads the short story writer to avoid the presentation of simultaneous scenes. On the relatively infrequent occasions when simultaneous scenes appear in the short story, the technique used in the novel---sectioning, parallel structure, definitive reference---is used in the short story.

#### Order of Time

John Gallishaw<sup>13</sup> maintains that "there are only two ways to tell the modern short story: Chronologically, or in a Flash-back (anti-chronologically)." Taken literally, this is manifestly too arbitrary, but it is true that all orders of time are combinations of the two fundamental methods. The epic order, so natural to the drama, is even more necessary in the short story, which must begin without undue preamble, proceed without distraction,

<sup>12</sup>Poe, A, 379-380.

<sup>13</sup>Gallishaw, OTWWS, 486.





and end with despatch.

The treatment of the order of time is often limited by the point of view selected for the story. The first person narrative, with its attendant device of reminiscence, enables the author to pass naturally and plausibly from present to past:

"Them two was always argufying. My Dad wanted Moon Manor to be modern, but Ike hated machinery. He took a ax and chopped up the first mow what My Dad bought on accounta it cut off a jack-rabbit's leg, and I recollect well the first time he saw a car.

"Him and Us Kids had all been berrying and when we come up outa the river bottom we saw that our hitching posts was all filled up with teams and ponies, and that our big corral fence was lined with neighbors. This often happened; folks heard of something and then come to hear what Ike thought about it. As we come up, Big Melody what was sitting long side of My Dad on the corral gate called out, 'Well, Parson, what's the sermon tonight?'

"Big Melody always said this and it always made Ike mad, but this night he didn't answer back on accounta we all had saw the thing. We knowed what it was from the papers, but we was all com-fluttered to see one standing right there by our corral like as if it had a right. A city man was sitting on the front seat. Ike walked up to him looking so mad that the City Man put up his fists. Ike turned to My Dad. 'You sit there on your goddamned monkey tail and laugh, with a thing like that on your homeplace,' Ike said, 'David, you're a disgrace to the Moons.'

"'Drive it around the corral a couple of times, Mr. Kalkins,' My Dad said, laughing so he had to put his hands over his heart where the pain always come. 'Let Ike see how it goes.'

"It made a noise like thunder in the Firehole Divide when it moved. Ike dropped the berry pails and lifted Us Kids up to My Dad outa harm's way. The hosses began to scream and kick and one team broke loose and ran with the buggy right out in our potato patch afore the thing stopped.

"'It's a magic wonder the earth don't open right up and swallow such a blasphemous thing,' Ike marveled. 'It's worse than a train, cause it ain't got no tracks so's you can figure out where it'll go.'"<sup>14</sup>

The danger inherent in the method is a facile discursiveness which might violate the Unity of Subject so essential to the short story. In the above passage the digression so typical of reminiscence is artistically justified by

<sup>14</sup>Shumway, IUM, 64-5.

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the light it throws upon the character of Ike.

The numbered procession (one hesitates to call it progression) which characterizes Villa's "Untitled Story" over-rides the order of time with an arithmetical imposition which is singularly unsatisfying:

"1 Father Did not understand my love for Vi, so Father sent me to America to study away from her. I could not do anything and I left.

"2 I was afraid of my father.

"3 On the boat I was seasick and I could not eat. I thought of home and my girl and I had troubled dreams.

"4 The blue waves in the young sunlight were like azure dancing flowers but they danced ceaselessly to the tune of the sun, to look at them made me dizzy. Then I would go to my cabin and lie down and sometimes I cried.

"5 We were one month at sea. When I arrived in America I was lonely.

"6 I windowshopped at Market Street in San Francisco and later when I was in Los Angeles I went to Hollywood but I remained lonely.

"7 I saw President Hoover's home in Palo Alto but I did not care for President Hoover.

"8 In California too I saw a crippled woman selling pencils on a sidewalk. It was night and she sat on the cold concrete like an old hen but she had no brood. She looked at me with dumb faithful eyes.

"9 The nigger in the Pullman hummed to himself. At night he prepared our berths and he was automatic like a machine. As I looked at him I knew I did not want to be a machine.

"10 In the university where I went there were no boys yet. It was only August and school would not begin until September. The university was on a hill and there the winds blew strong. In my room at night I could hear the winds howling like helpless young puppies. The winds were little blind dogs crying for their mother.

"11 Where was the mother of the winds? I lay in bed listening to the windchildren crying for their mother but I would fall asleep before their mother had returned to them.

"12 During the day the little blind puppies did not whimper much. It was only at night that they grew afraid of the dark and then they cried for their mother. Did their mother ever come to them? Maybe their mother had a lover and she loved this lover more than the little blind puppies."<sup>15</sup>

Even the logic of mathematics cannot bridge the wide gap between the realistic and the mystic in this disconnected catalog of paragraphs.

<sup>15</sup>Villa, US, 309-310.

The first is the question of the

The second is the question of the

The third is the question of the

The fourth is the question of the

The fifth is the question of the

The sixth is the question of the

The seventh is the question of the

The eighth is the question of the

The ninth is the question of the

The tenth is the question of the

The eleventh is the question of the

The twelfth is the question of the

The thirteenth is the question of the

The fourteenth is the question of the

The fifteenth is the question of the

The sixteenth is the question of the

The seventeenth is the question of the

The eighteenth is the question of the

The nineteenth is the question of the

The twentieth is the question of the

The twenty-first is the question of the

The twenty-second is the question of the

The twenty-third is the question of the

The twenty-fourth is the question of the

The twenty-fifth is the question of the

The twenty-sixth is the question of the

The twenty-seventh is the question of the

The twenty-eighth is the question of the

The twenty-ninth is the question of the

The thirtieth is the question of the

The thirty-first is the question of the

The thirty-second is the question of the

The thirty-third is the question of the

The thirty-fourth is the question of the

The thirty-fifth is the question of the

The thirty-sixth is the question of the

The thirty-seventh is the question of the

The thirty-eighth is the question of the

The thirty-ninth is the question of the

The fortieth is the question of the



## Tempo

The best tempo is one that is in harmony with the material; in the following passage, the monotony of the material results in a slow tempo:

"He had married his wife very largely because there was no one else who could so easily be married; and she, after attending quite a respectable time, had married him because no one better had turned up.

"It was not that any particular urgency of the blood drove them to each other's arms; for they could not have mustered one infantile passion between them. It was that one married at a certain time after leaving school. It is one of the things that are done. They lived on the same tram-line. They went to the same Church. They attended the same semi-clerical or lay clerical meetings and missions which every Church fosters. They were thus continually meeting, and at last saluting, and at long last, through the introduction of a clergyman, speaking.

"He saw her home once: he saw her home again: then he always saw her home."<sup>16</sup>

The monotonous succession of simple declarative sentences of the same unvarying structure is in perfect keeping with the slow tempo of the drab theme.

## Type of Story and Time Technique

The literary theories which the author holds will affect his treatment of the time element. Impressionism, for example, deals very plausibly with the problem of continuous time:

"'You have a spark of the divine fire,' Miss Cox said. 'You should make writing your vocation.'

"Elizabeth flamed. Miss Cox, my dear, themes about immigrants, blackboards and desks whirled and fused in the divine fire.....

"To Miss Perry Greece was the aorist of tithemi and Xenophon's march in the Anabasis. Elizabeth always said to herself as she came into the 3 A room I hate Miss Perry, the aorist and Xenophon. Oh, how I hate them.

"But this morning Elizabeth only pitied Miss Perry. She had no spark of the divine fire, poor thing.....

"'Now, Miss Morris, will you please give me the principal parts of the verb to give.'

"That was didami. But what was the perfect tense? Divine fire, divine fire.

<sup>16</sup>Stephens, D, 329.





"If you don't know, you may sit down. But I warn you that unless you do your home lessons better you are not going to pass this month."

"Divine fire, divine fire....."<sup>17</sup>

The strong thread of "divine fire" knits together the activities of the day.

But impressionism is not limited only to the presentation of continuous time. It is singularly effective in suggesting timelessness, of being adrift on a sea of time---now going forward, now backward, now hovering on the brink of a wave, now plunging, plunging.....

"It is the world of eternal night, thinks Jean Silvius. Charlemagne. Auerochs. Merovingian hatchets. Arioste. Ten billion years emerge with wail and whine. Shifting of substantives. Idols on rocks. Mourning dance.

"The organ weeps the Dies Irae.

"Jean stamps into a fable. There had been love, there had been drunkenness, there had been chaos. Not much with which to grow hopeful, or with which to storm a few more years. He X-rays the past six months. A dump-heap. Broken casseroles. Lizards. Letters smeared with dung. Weeds. Safety-razor blades. And in ashes lies the broken verse.

"This is the nave of a Gothic church. Bats are in the organ-loft. St. Anthony smiles in the stained-glass window.

"A catafalque wreathed with dripping candles stands in front of the altar. Jean's father lies beneath the dark draperies and the autumn flowers, his hands folded over his breast, his face a waxen mask."<sup>18</sup>

The inchoate, disconnected series of sentences defies the laws of time---and almost of comprehension.

The realistic short story, on the other hand, almost a sketch in its unplotted structure, tends to treat time chronologically, avoiding retrospective exposition as much as possible. "A Casual Incident"<sup>19</sup> is typical of the school in its photographic record of experience, in the phonographic reproduction of dialogue, and its minimum of exposition. Yet, despite the repe-

<sup>17</sup>Foley, OS, 83-4.

<sup>18</sup>Jolas, D, 111.

<sup>19</sup>Farrell, CI, 75-80.





tiveness of the conversation, the tempo has the illusion of rapidity which conversation usually imparts to a narrative.

Only stories of fantasy completely disregard time. Time is of no consequence in such a passage as this:

"And I looked long at those curved and beautiful bones that were no longer able to hurt the smallest creature in all the worlds that they had made. And I thought long of the evil that they had done, and also of the good. But when I thought of Their great hands coming red and wet from battles to make a primrose for a child to pick, then I forgave the gods.

"And a gentle rain came falling out of heaven and stilled the restless sand, and a soft green moss grew suddenly and covered the bones till they looked like strange green hills, and I heard a cry and awoke and found that I had dreamed, and looking out of my house into the street I found that a flash of lightning had killed a child. Then I knew that the gods still lived."<sup>20</sup>

The dreamer, in looking at his vision, has no thought of the ticking of the clock.

The moralizing inherent in the didactic tale usually results in a slow tempo. Aesop's Fables are swift narratives until the instruction which puts clogs on man's imagination slows the pace down. In a similar way, the concluding paragraphs of O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi" dive into the murky waters of moral disquisition where before the story had flown in the airy depths of fiction.

The surprise short story is characterized by a sudden shift in tempo from slow to fast. Thus, in "Our Lady's Juggler", Anatole France leisurely takes six pages to describe how Barnaby, the itinerant juggler, turned monk, and in his simple heart longed to emulate the works of reverence his fellow monks performed for the glory of the Virgin; he mysteriously sought solitude:

"A demeanour so strange awakened the curiosity of the monks.  
"These began to ask one another for what purpose Brother Bar-

<sup>20</sup> Dunsany, BW, 189.





naby could be indulging so persistently in retreat.

"The prior, whose duty it is to let nothing escape him in the behavior of his children in religion, resolved to keep a watch over Barnaby during his withdrawals to the chapel. One day, then, when he was shut up there after his custom, the prior, accompanied by two of the older monks, went to discover through the chinks in the door what was going on within the chapel.

"They saw Barnaby before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, head downwards, with his feet in the air, and he was juggling with six balls of copper and a dozen knives. In honour of the Holy Mother of God he was performing those feats, which aforetime had won him most renown. Not recognizing that the simple fellow was thus placing at the service of the Blessed Virgin his knowledge and skill, the two old monks exclaimed against the sacrilege."

Then, in one short paragraph, in almost breathless tempo, comes the denouement:

"The prior was aware how stainless was Barnaby's soul, but he concluded that he had been seized with madness. They were all three preparing to lead him swiftly from the chapel, when they saw the Blessed Virgin descend the steps of the altar and advance to wipe away with a fold of her azure robe the sweat which was dropping from her juggler's forehead."<sup>21</sup>

The unexpected comes, and the tempo races with it.

The action story, with its strongly plotted structure, has a tight time scheme and the rapid tempo which is the usual concomitant of violent physical activity. The pulp magazines furnish innumerable examples of this type.

The atmospheric tale, whose best-known practitioner is Edgar Allan Poe, usually deals with a "frozen moment" and its slow tempo is a result of the long descriptions essential to its type.

<sup>21</sup>France, OLJ, 227.





## IV

## SUMMARY

Duration of Time

The duration of time covered by any narrative is dependent chiefly upon the nature of its theme. A complex theme, requiring subtle development of a number of details, usually results in a lengthy narrative and a considerable span of time; thus, novels trace the growth of individuals and families through hundreds of pages and decades of time. A comparatively simple theme, such as those characteristically treated in the short story, covers both a short space and a short period of time. The drama, which can vary its length from one to five acts and more (witness O'Neill's dramas), ranges in time span from the briefness of the short story to the expansiveness of the novel.

It is the theme, through the Unity of Subject, which determines the duration of time necessary to any particular story; the theme is the bed of Procrustes to which the length of time must be adjusted.

Lapse of Time

The scenic structure is characteristic of all narrative. The scene may be considered the unity in every form of narrative, and time the connecting, unifying factor. Each scene is realistic in its time treatment, i. e., continuous, with story time approximating chronological time.

It is the problem of Lapse of Time to join the successive scenes in a plausible time sequence, a problem which can be solved by a wider application of the dramatic concept of Double-Time. During each scene the reader is conscious of a swift time---the Short Time of double-time; but in the





links which bind together the scenes the author makes the reader aware of the lapse of time---the Long Time of double-time.

Some specific methods used to indicate the lapse of time are:

Direct reference

Chronicle style

Mechanical methods

a. In novel and short story---asterisks, space divisions, sections.

b. In drama---stage conventions, curtain.

Describing the events that occurred in the interim

Rapid retrospect

Elision

Symbolism

"Habitual" detail

Repetition (in effect, a slow tempo that makes time drag so that much time seems to have passed in relatively short space)

Cadenced prose

Strong motivation (causation bridges the gaps in time)

"Cover scene" (in drama)

The cover scene, widely used in the drama, can be applied to both novel and short story. It depends for its effect upon the psychological nature of story time---that peculiar phenomenon in which time seems to cluster around moments of violent action and emotion. By appealing to the "just then" of his reader's consciousness with a swift-moving scene, the author can impress his reader's sub-consciousness with the passage of time. While the device is particularly suited to the stage---where the reader must go forward with the action, and cannot return to quibble unduly---the cover scene can be effectively used in the other forms of narrative.

#### Instantaneous Time

To treat each scene with dramatic immediacy the author may first set the scene vividly by appealing to the senses of the reader in a description, and placing it definitely in time (month, day, year). Then he may cause the reader to associate himself with a character in the scene by presenting the





scene through the latter's eyes (by psychological projection or impressionism). Again, he may view the scene from a temporal perspective, seeing it in all its philosophical implications.

The mechanical concomitants of Instantaneous Time are usually the use of the present tense and the descriptive past.

### Simultaneous Time

The problem of simultaneous time arises more frequently in the novel than in the short story or drama. The drama, on rare occasions, uses multiple stages to treat simultaneous scenes, or simply follows one scene by the other. The novel, with its complex structure of interlacing incidents, often requires the author to present scenes occurring simultaneously. The short story shares with the novel the simultaneous time technique of arranging sections in parallel form and/or passing from one to the other by the following transitions:

By concrete detail (letter, scrap-book, etc.)

By association of ideas

By the same introductory time phrase.

### Order of Time

Though all orders of time are fundamentally combinations of the chronological and anti-chronological, the epic order is to be preferred in the shorter forms of narrative, and shares equal honors with the chronological in the novel.

### Tempo

Tempo is not an absolute: it is a relation between author and reader that varies with every reader. The same passage may seem to have a swift tempo to one reader---a slow tempo to another. If the author is proceeding faster with the tale than the reader, the latter has the impression of a





swift tempo; if the reader is anticipating the author---of a slow tempo.

Some of the elements which keep the author in advance of the reader, and consequently speed the tempo are:

- Conversation
- Action (physical activity)
- Strict adherence to unity
- Objective presentation (indirect narration)
- Rapid time transitions
- Stylistic mechanisms
  - a. Elimination of modifiers and connectives
  - b. Short, loose sentences
  - c. Increased proportion of verbs (transitive and active)
- Clarity
- Strong motivation (telescopes action)

Any distraction from the main path of the story will let the impatient reader race ahead of the author, and will slow down the tempo:

- Philosophizing
- Description (in blocks)
- Exposition (in blocks)
- Introspection
- Psychological analysis
- Lack of Clarity





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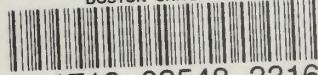


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